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Dairy Farm Record Keeping and Information Sources

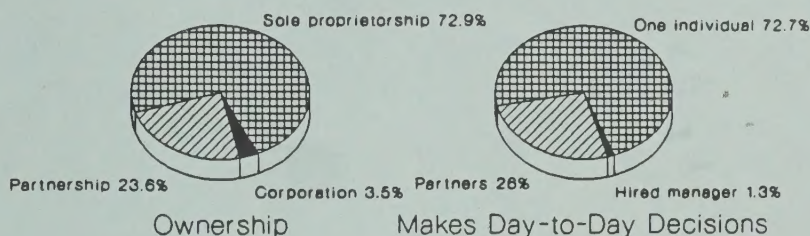
National Dairy Heifer Evaluation Project

Progressive farmers recognize the importance of obtaining up-to-date information and putting it to use. In the U.S., dairy farmers have a wealth of information available from off-farm sources.

During a 1991-92 study by the National Animal Health Monitoring System (USDA:APHIS:VS), dairy farmers were asked about the types of records kept on the farm and their outside information sources. The National Dairy Heifer Evaluation Project (NDHEP) included 1,811 farms in 28 states.¹ These operations were randomly chosen so that the results could not only be used to describe the participants, but would be representative of herds of 30 cows or more in those 28 states. The herds represent 78 percent of the National dairy cow population. The average size of the operations represented in the study was 85.7 cows.

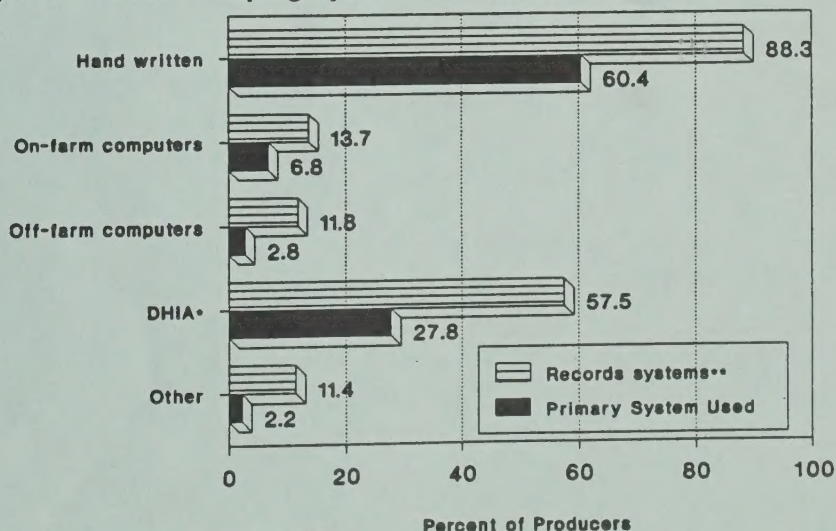
The operations represented by the NDHEP are largely sole proprietorship (72.9 percent), as shown in Figure 1. Day-to-day decisions are made primarily by one individual (72.7 percent of the operations). Partners make the decisions on 26.0 percent of the operations, and only 1.3 percent of the day-to-day decisions are made by a hired manager.

Figure 1. Dairy Operation Ownership and Decision-making



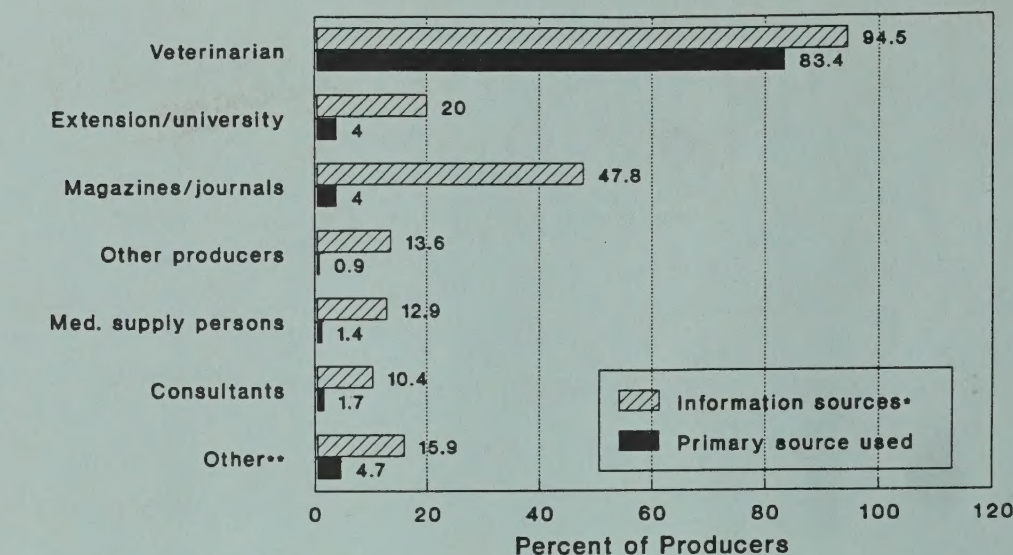
On-farm record keeping systems used on dairy farms are shown in Figure 2. Hand-written records are used by 88.3 percent of the producers, while almost 14 percent have on-farm computers. Off-farm computers are used to keep a variety of information such as financial and accounting records or herd health information. The data indicate that more than 57 percent of the dairy producers use Dairy Herd Improvement

Figure 2. Record Keeping Systems Used on Dairy Farms



¹States participating in the National Dairy Heifer Evaluation Project (NDHEP): Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Figure 3. Information Sources Used by Dairy Farmers to Make Health Care Decisions



*Producers may use more than one source.

**Includes producer associations, media, and miscellaneous sources.

Association (DHIA) programs - reported here separately from other off-farm computers. Eleven percent use other systems of record keeping.

While a variety of record keeping systems are available to dairy farmers, most rely on a single means of keeping track of the farm's status and activities. Figure 2 shows that producers use a ledger or notebook most often (60.4 percent) as their primary means of record keeping. It is interesting to note that while hand-written records are an integral source of day-to-day management, a proportion of dairy farmers use some sort of on-farm or off-farm computer, including DHIA computing facilities as their primary method of record keeping. This reflects the growing amount of data being collected on today's dairy farm as well as the growing demand for information by dairy farmers.

Off-farm information sources tapped by dairy farmers to make health care decisions are shown in Figure 3. As might be expected, the veterinarian is the most common source of information. Dairy magazines and journals are also popular, as are the

USDA's Cooperative Extension Service and university sources, and medical supply salespeople.

Producers view the veterinarian as the single most important source of information (83.4 percent). A few rely most heavily on information from the Cooperative Extension Service and dairy magazines or agricultural journals (4.0 percent each). 🐄

NDHEP collaborators also included the National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA:NASS), National Veterinary Services Laboratories (USDA:APHIS:VS), and State and Federal Veterinary Medical Officers. For more information on the National Dairy Heifer Evaluation Project and other NAHMS programs, please contact:

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